

(NOTE: There is much speculation about Jesus receiving the Spirit “without measure,” and some false conclusions about Jesus and the Holy Spirit have been drawn based upon this view of John 3:34. R. C. H. Lenski contends that this verse applies to John the Baptist, not Christ. His comments on vv. 31-34 are given in the piece below. I am making this available for your own private study of the subject. I have replaced the Greek words and put them in parenthesis with a transliteration (without the markings), and I have added some brief notes on what words are referred to when it is not clear from what has just been said, or from what immediately follows. These brief notes, or in some cases a single word, are followed with “ww” to let you know these are my words — Walton Weaver)

“For God Giveth Not the Spirit by Measure”

by R. C. H. Lenski

“31) The Baptist has thus far spoken of the relation between Jesus and himself, shutting off the foolish notions voiced in the complaint of his disciples. Now he turns to the other side, and the relation of Jesus to men, which includes in particular also his relation to these complaining disciples. The Baptist wants them to follow Jesus as Andrew, John, and the others did. Their whole view of Jesus must be changed accordingly. Thus we receive the supreme part of the Baptist’s final testimony of the Sonship of Jesus. **He that comes from above is above all men, he that is of the earth is of the earth and of the earth he speaks; he that comes from heaven is above all men.** The heavenly origin of Jesus makes him supreme over all men, who are wholly of earthly origin. Both substantivized present participles (*ho erchomentos*) and (*o on*) (that is, the one *coming* from above, and the one *being* or who *is* of the earth, ww) are used without reference to time, and is used to express origin or source. Yet we should note that the former is a standing designation for the expected Messiah. Even now since he has come he is in the eminent sense ‘the Coming One.’ Since the entire contrast from verse 27 onward deals with persons, ‘above all’ must mean not ‘above all things’ but ‘above all men.’ Of him who is ‘of the earth’ nothing can be said except that ‘he is of the earth,’ on a level with all others who are like him and above nobody. Hence also all his speaking, whatever utterance he makes (*λαλει*), is of the same nature, ‘of the earth.’ On the other hand, ‘he that comes from heaven’ (now using this elucidating phrase) ‘is above all men’ not merely in his speaking but in everything. The two *παντων* show that the contrast is here not between Jesus and the Baptist only but between Jesus and all men in general. This mighty contrast these disciples must know and keep in mind.

“32) With this clear, the Baptist proceeds to the speaking of Jesus, save that (*lalein*) is too ordinary a verb to apply to him. **What he has seen and did hear, of that he bears witness; and no man receives his witness.** That this is, like his origin, testimony of things seen and heard in heaven goes without saying (1:18). Grammarians have difficulty with the two verbs, one a perfect, the other an aorist, ‘has seen,’ ‘did hear.’

They ask whether the perfect is aoristic, or the aorist is used in the sense of the perfect. They certainly can be understood most easily just as they stand. The perfect is extensive: what Jesus has seen in heaven all along; the aorist is punctiliar noting the past fact (historical). Jesus 'has seen' all there is to be seen in heaven and can testify accordingly. The aorist 'did hear' is not added as a duplicate of all that Jesus also heard in heaven, all the lovely music in the heavenly language in the conversations with God. The aorist is specific and refers to the punctiliar word or commission which sent the Son forth into the world. It indicates the counsel of God for our salvation, the loving commands of the Father, 7:16; 8:28; 12:49, 50; etc. Of these things Jesus came to testify.

“The *kai* ('and,' ww) coordinates two contrary acts: this superlative testimony and its rejection. Not by mere revelation does Jesus speak as did the prophets of old, but from actual presence in heaven he 'bears witness' at firsthand, absolutely directly. Nothing truer and more trustworthy can ever reach men. And the things he testifies thus are the very ones men need most of all, the fact and realities about God in heaven, his will, purpose, and plans concerning men. 'And his testimony---this wondrous testimony---no one receives. The very coordination of the statements lets us feel the enormity of the guilt implied, as in 1:10, 11. To receive testimony = to believe it; not to receive it = to disbelieve it, refuse to trust it, treat it as a lie. The fact that the negation is not meant to be absolute the very next words show.

“33) **He that did receive his witness did seal that God is true.** At this point and through the next verse commentators present views with which we cannot agree. Who is this that received Jesus' witness and sealed that God is true? The Baptist here does what he has done in his previous statements, he allows us to infer to whom he is referring. Both the aorist participle and the aorist main verb are definite, each denoting a past act. The Baptist refers to himself. There were, indeed, a few others besides the Baptist who also did receive Jesus' witness. In a manner the words apply also to these. But in their full sense they apply only to the Baptist himself. As far as the receiving is concerned, he stands first and foremost and helped the first of his own disciples also to receive Jesus' witness. At this very moment he is trying to make his remaining disciples do the same. The actual situation is sometimes lost sight of, and the comment of some expositors reads as though the Baptist here utters abstract, general statements, like a man who is writing a book not like one who is talking face to face with a few men in order to move them to a definite act. The Baptist here virtually tells his disciples, 'I did receive his witness, I did seal,' etc. To let this aorist (*ho laben*) (the one *receiving* him, ww) refer also to such as in the future will receive Jesus' witness, is to extend its force too far. Such a thought is an inference not the meaning of the word itself.

“When the Baptist speaks of sealing that God is true, veracious, *verax*, he, of course, does not mean that God's being true would not be sufficiently certified without such a seal. The declarative *hoti* ("that," ww) (R. 1034) states what the seal attests. God is true even if all men called him a liar. A seal is not intended for the person issuing a document but for the one to whom it is issued, to assure him. So God himself adds seals to his truth not for his own sake or for the truth's sake but for our sakes. What does the

Baptist mean by saying, 'He that did receive his witness did seal that God is true'? Here again some generalize: the seal is faith or the saving effect of Jesus' testimony. This, they say, acts like a seal or proof, helping to assure the believer and others that God is true in his revelation of Jesus. Thus again sight is lost of the actual situation: the Baptist trying to assure his disciples who were finding fault with Jesus. And how faith and trust in error and deception? Does it, too, 'seal' and make error truth? The Baptist is speaking of *himself* and by no means of himself as an ordinary believer. He is divinely commissioned (1:6), to him special direct divine revelation was given (1:31, etc.). He had far more than his own personal faith to append as a seal, he had *his word and testimony as a prophet of God, the word of the revelation he had received*. For his disciples this seal ought to have great weight. There were to be others like this, namely the apostles (1:14). Their personal faith is an entirely minor matter. The seal they present is far higher.

"34) The commentators who misunderstand v. 33 are also not clear with regard to v. 34. **For he whom God did commission speaks the words of God; for the Spirit gives not from (insufficient) measure.** What does *gar* ("for," ww) prove or explain? The fact that faith acts as a seal? Impossible. The thought of v. 34 runs in an entirely different line. Only properly related statements can be joined by 'for.' Therefore v. 34 does not refer to Jesus himself but to the Baptist. The simple story is this: John tells his disciples, in order to convince and assure them, that he himself puts the seal of his authority and his person on God's truth that Jesus is the Messiah; and then, in order to establish the weight of this statement more fully, he explains (*gar*) that he, sent by God, utters nothing less than the words of God, and this he can do because the Spirit gives such utterance to him in adequate measure.

"'He whom God did commission' is the Baptist and not Jesus. The claim that only one 'from heaven' (v. 31b) can be 'commissioned' is contradicted by 1:6 and 1:33, where the Baptist is the one 'commissioned.' In v. 31, 32 Jesus is (*o erchomenos*), 'the One Coming.' Now it is true that Jesus, too, is 'sent' or 'commissioned,' and that he afterward tells the Jews much about his 'Sender.' But here the fact that Jesus is sent is out of line both with what precedes and what follows. The aorist (*epesteilen*) (sent or *commissioned*, ww) indicates the past act when God sent the Baptist on his great mission. Thus sent---let his disciples note it well---he speaks the words of God, literally, 'he utters the utterances of God.' For (*lalein*) (*speaks*, ww) is the opposite of being silent; and (*remata*) (*words*, ww) are merely utterances, whereas (*logoi*) (a word not in the verse, ww) are the thoughts put into statements. Of Jesus the Baptist has just said far more in v. 32, namely that he 'testifies' the actual things he has seen and did hear in heaven. Why would he now reduce this exalted statement? But of the Baptist this is, indeed, the highest that can be said: God places his words on his prophet's lips. He is in the same class with the prophets who were sent before his day.

"Another *gar* ("for," ww) explains how the Baptist can utter God's words, 'for the Spirit gives not from (insufficient) measure.' It is hard to decide from the Greek whether God is the subject of the sentence, as our versions take it, or whether it is 'the Spirit.' The sense, fortunately, is quite the same, for the point to be explained is the Baptist's ability to

convey God's utterances. He can do this if God gives him the Spirit in proper measure; or if the Spirit gives him the utterances in proper measure. Yet this yap clause convinces so many that Jesus is here meant and they do not think that it could be the Baptist. The present tense of the verb, (*didosi*) ("he gives," ww), which means 'continues to give,' should give them pause. If Jesus were referred to, this would have to be the aorist (*edoke*), 'did give,' i. e., when the Spirit descended upon him 'as a dove.' This continuous bestowal is vouchsafed to the Baptist, as it was to the prophets before him, day by day for his work.

"Finally, (*ouk ek metrou*) is taken to mean 'unmeasured,' 'without measure,' 'not by measure,' a litotes for 'in complete fullness.' This misconception has led many to refer the entire verse to Jesus. The phrase means: not in narrow or insufficient measure, as though the ordinary limits could not be exceeded. The English has no corresponding idiom; *ek* is not our English 'by' (in the phrase "by measure," ww). The Spirit (or if we prefer the other subject: God) gives as he wills, in richest measure, by revelation and by inspiration, the words he wants his messengers to utter. This, indeed, establishes the fact that the Baptist, as God's messenger, can and does speak God's own words when he points his disciples to Jesus. The Spirit sees to it that he is properly equipped. The disciples have every reason to believe and to obey his words as being 'the utterances of God' himself."

---**The Interpretation of St. John's Gospel**, pp. 286-292